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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CARACAS 000038

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SUBJECT: THE RESHUFFLE: SUPPLEMENTAL BIOS ON KEY POLITICAL
CABINET POSITIONS

REF: A. CARACAS 00014

[1](#)B. CARACAS 00025

[1](#)C. 07 CARACAS 01250

[1](#)D. 06 CARACAS 01635

[1](#)E. 07 CARACAS 00149

[1](#)F. 07 CARACAS 01742

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Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT DOWNES
FOR REASON 1.4 (D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. During his January 6 "Alo, Presidente" television broadcast Chavez formally announced changes to five political cabinet-level positions: the Vice Presidency, the Office of the Presidency, the Ministry of Interior and Justice, Ministry of Communications, and Ministry of Sports and Health. These appointments form part of a cabinet shake-up that saw 13 ministries change hands. Chavez appears to be closing ranks and surrounding himself with long-time political confidants, albeit with questionable performance records. Two of the five ministers are returning to a former position, three of five are former military officials. This report supplements biographical information provided in previous reporting (Ref. A and B). End Summary.

Ramon Carrizalez - Vice Presidency

[1](#)2. (SBU) President Chavez dismissed Jorge Rodriguez and appointed Ramon Carrizalez as Executive Vice President. Carrizalez is one of Chavez's trusted implementors as the number of high-profile initiatives and construction projects he has been tasked with since 2000 suggest. In December 2007, Carrizalez helped organize logistics for the "Emmanuel Operation," a Venezuela-led operation to recover three Colombian hostages by the FARC. Two of the hostages were subsequently released on January 10.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Carrizalez had been charged with tackling the severe housing shortage that has caused widespread discontent among some of Chavez's traditional sectors of support. His tenure as Minister of Housing, from June 2006 to January 2008, brought continuity to a ministry notorious for high turn-over rates. (Note: Most Housing Ministers last only eight to 14 months. End Note). In this position, however, he often failed to meet his own performance standards. In 2007, the Ministry reportedly delivered some 106,000 houses, severely short of the government's target of 150,000 units and well below demand.

¶4. (SBU) Carrizalez also coordinated construction efforts for the new Caracas-La Guaira bridge, which connects the capital to the country's biggest airport, after the old one collapsed in March 2006. Chavez touted the completion of the bridge, just days ahead of the Copa America regional soccer tournament, as a major accomplishment of the "revolution" (Ref. C). As Minister of Infrastructure from March 2004 to July 2006, Carrizalez launched the construction of two Caracas Metro lines as well as subways in Los Teques, Valencia, and Carabobo. In 2000, he served as president of the National Fund for Urban Transportation (Fontur).

¶5. (SBU) Carrizalez has a military background similar to that of other persons in Chavez's inner circle (Ref. D). The Vice President, a retired Army Colonel, graduated from the Venezuelan Military Academy in 1974, a year ahead of Chavez, and received a BA in Military Sciences and Arts. He retired in 1994.

Ramon Rodriguez Chacin - Interior and Justice

¶6. (C) Ramon Rodriguez Chacin returns as Minister of Interior and Justice (MIJ), a position he held from January to May 2002, and replaces Pedro Carreno. Rodriguez has a well-known background in intelligence gathering and served as the Director of the Special Police Intelligence Agency (DISIP) in ¶1999. His connection to DISIP was harshly criticized by the opposition and human rights organizations during his previous tenure as MIJ. At the behest of Chavez, Chacin announced his plans to combat soaring crime rates by reducing homicides, kidnappings, and drug trafficking during a January 8 nationwide television broadcast. He also said he plans to introduce a draft version of the National Police Law to the National Assembly in the coming days. Pablo Fernandez,

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director of Red de Apoyo, an organization that was active in drafting the National Police Reform Law, told Poloff January 8 he welcomed Chacin's early interest in citizen security, but remained wary of the law's implementation given the minister's professional background.

¶7. (SBU) Rodriguez is a long-time associate of Chavez and is his personal liaison with the FARC and the ELN. He played a key role in Venezuelan efforts to secure the release of FARC hostages on more than one occasion. In December 2007, he served as the government's coordinator of the "Emmanuel Operation" to attempt to recover three Colombian citizens kidnapped by the FARC. He personally participated in the recovery of two of them on January 10.

¶8. (SBU) Rodriguez is a retired Navy Captain and has worked as a lawyer and university professor. He participated in the November 1992 coup against former President Carlos Andres Perez. Rodriguez was temporarily arrested and detained by ex-judge Monica Fernandez during the events of April 2002 that temporarily removed President Chavez from power.

Jesse Chacon - Office of the Presidency

¶9. (SBU) Chavez tapped Jesse Chacon to serve as his new Secretary of the President's Office on January 4 (Ref A).

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Jesse Chacon, 42, led the Ministry of Telecommunications prior to his appointment where he directed the closure of opposition network Radio Caracas Television (RCTV). Chacon is a graduate of the National Experimental University of the Army (Unefa). He and Chavez have a long history together going back to their days in the military and participation in the failed February 1992 coup. A systems engineer with a

postgraduate degree from France, Chacon became Secretary General for the National Telecommunications Commission in 1999, where he was the architect of the national telecommunications plan. From 2003-2004, Chacon served as Minister of Communications. An ideologue and unwavering Chavista loyalist, Chacon is a vehement critic of the U.S.

¶10. (C) While Minister of the Interior, Chacon was a negative influence in joint cooperation against drug trafficking (Ref. E). Chacon's new portfolio not only moves him closer to Chavez, but also indicates that the Venezuelan president continues to value his advice.

Andres Izarra - Communications

¶11. (C) Andres Izarra, 35, replaces William Lara as Minister of Communications. Prior to his appointment, Izarra was president of the government-affiliated regional television network, Telesur, beginning in 2006. At Telesur, Izarra agreed to meet with Embassy officials on occasion (Ref. F). He was previously Minister of Communications from September 2004 to February 2006. Prior to that, he served as Press Counselor at the Venezuelan Embassy.

¶12. (SBU) As a television producer, Izarra worked as the News Manager of Radio Caracas Television's (RCTV's) popular evening news program "El Observador" until his resignation in April 2002. He was also a former Latin American assignment editor at CNN. He is the son of one of Chavez's closest friends, William Izarra, an ideological author of the "Bolivarian Revolution." Izarra married Isabel Adelaida, the step-daughter of hard-line opposition leader Antonio Ledezma, president of the Alianza Bravo Pueblo party, in 2005. He has one daughter.

Victoria Mata - Sports and Health

¶13. (C) Victoria Mata replaces Eduardo Alvarez as the new Minister of Sports and Health. On January 9, Mata met and congratulated the women's national volleyball team on their qualification to the Olympic Summer Games in Beijing. She served as Vice President of Sports and Recreation at the same ministry prior to her appointment. Mata was a Fifth Republic Movement (MVR) National Assembly deputy from Bolivar state from 2000-2005. In this capacity she served as President of the Sports Subcommittee and as a member of the Culture and Sports Commission. She was also a member of the National

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Constituent Assembly that drafted the 1999 Constitution. During her tenure as a legislator, Mata was characterized as pragmatic and not prone to share the extremist positions of hard-core Chavistas.

¶14. (SBU) Mata worked extensively as a sports journalist prior to her election to the National Assembly. Most notably, she worked at the regional newspaper "El Correo de Caroni" from 1987 to 1999, where her reporting gained national recognition. She was awarded the 1989-1990 Journalism Award for Sports. Mata graduated in 1985 from Zulia University. She was born in Margarita, Nueva Esparta state.

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